

INTRODUCTION:

Today, we'll look into the theme of Jesus calling His first disciples. I'll call this message Five Who Followed In Faith. Let me start off by saying that being a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ is no little thing; it carries great weight in importance alongside with great discipline.

Remember this: **little demands get little response from people – big demands get heroic responses from people**. And that's the kind of demands Jesus made and continues to make upon people today.

This is especially true in any field – especially that of sport. A great sportsman requires great discipline. I'll never forget back in 2000 when Ian Thorpe was a world champion swimmer, an interviewer asked how he thinks he'll go in the race. The champ replied, "I don't wake up 4am every morning not to win!" And I think that's the difference between someone who is mediocre and someone who is great in their field. The same applies to coaches – a great coach places great demands upon their teams through discipline and rigid training, then therefore he gets a quality, winning team. There is no such thing as a great team that revolves around a mediocre coach.

When that thought is applied to Christ, we see that Jesus also places great demands upon His followers. Jesus is never interested in just bolstering up the numbers of Christianity for the sake of numbers. Jesus is very interested in building a quality body, whose muscles and joints, and bones and limbs fit together and work properly into a quality lifestyle. He didn't pull you from the ranks of mediocre humanity just to swell up the ranks of a church. No! He calls you just as He called the five men we'll look at this morning with a much bigger purpose and expectation in mind. Something powerful. Something that makes a difference in the way we live!

GENERAL OVERVIEW

Let's just briefly get an overview of the ground we're about to cover this morning. Today we'll really stick with the Bible so if you haven't got one, go get one from the entrance, or be sure to look on beside someone. Without a Bible, you'll only be listening to human opinion.

A. Time: Verses 29-51 read very much like a 3-day diary. Notice the various times it says "the next day" in vv.29, 35, and 43. This is exactly how it all happened chronologically.

B. Structure: When we examine the structure of the passage, it is again simple and straightforward. With each of the five men there seems to be an evangelistic approach to the gospel, which comes in the form of a message, and then there's a response.

C. People: Now, just a final word about the characters we're about to meet. There are five men here, however only four are actually named: Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. The fifth is John who, as the author, he remains unnamed. Let me say something about these men before we analyse this passage as far as the approach, the message, and the response is concerned. These men are often presented in popular religious literature as saints. Aren't they?

In fact, many Catholic churches are named after an apostle. I remember growing up in Springwood and there was a catholic church there called St Andrews. I recall going to a service there one time, because I was to become a Godfather to someone I was witnessing to, and in that church there stood a statue of a saintly meek-looking man – it was meant to be Andrew. He had his hands folded, wore the sandals with the flowing robes, and there seemed to be an aura around it. I remember seeing a few people around it who touched the stature and looked at it as if to say, "Oh, wow! Saint Andrew."

Let me just tell you something: Andrew was a nothing-special type of a guy. In fact, the best thing you could say about Andrew is that he was Simon-Peter's brother. He always had to live in the shadow of his older brother. I mean, these guys are not saintly. They are saints in that they are members of the body of Christ, but they're not saintly. They're not flawless. They're not perfect specimens of human perfection. They come across on Scripture as very ordinary, T-shirt-and-blue-jeans hard working men.

SPECIFIC EXPOSITION

A. Andrew and John. (vv.35-59)

The scene is set here to highlight a transfer of allegiance from John the Baptist to Jesus – which fulfilled the Baptist's mission of '*making straight the way for the Lord*' (we looked at this two weeks ago). Not surprisingly, the two disciples followed after Christ.

Approach: The approach John the Baptist used here is what is termed as mass evangelism. This means that there was one gifted person who gave the good news to large numbers of people. Today we know them as Franklin Graham, or Billy Graham, or D. L. Moody, or Charles Finney, or John Wesley. They swept the nation with the news of Jesus Christ.

Message: John the Baptist was the first evangelist of the first century – he pointed to Christ and said to everyone, "There's the Lamb of God, follow Him!" that is the only message a true evangelist has. True evangelism revolves around a true presentation of Jesus Christ and nothing else. Not about money, wealth, prosperity, blessings, prophecies about doors opening, or opportunities for bigger and greater and more wonderful showers of goodness to fall upon you.... No, true evangelism is about presenting the sinful state of your soul and the consequences that await, and the solution that God has given in the form of His Son Jesus Christ, and the cross, and His blood, and the availability for the forgiveness that sin problem, and the eternal life that follows. What good news, what hope, what love, what a Saviour! That is true evangelism.

Response: When the two heard this, they followed Jesus. How simple! How beautiful! That's precisely what happened when you heard the good news. By the way, can you think back to when you first heard the good news? Can you remember the person God used in your life? Maybe it was your brother, or your father. Maybe a friend, a pastor or a preacher. Maybe it was a work colleague who consistently lived out his faith in Christ, day in, day out. Someone who continually carried out a lifestyle of truth and honesty – and that spoke to you and led you to faith in the Lord Jesus. Think back. All you did was follow Jesus Christ. Maybe you were like the self-sustained individual who wrote this poem:

*I have walked life's way with an easy tread, I have travelled for pleasure and comfort led
Until one day in a quiet place, I met the Master face-to-face*

*With station, wealth and rank for my goal, Much thought for my body but none for my soul
I had entered to lend this life's mad race, then I met the Master face-to-face*

*I built my castles and reared them high, Till their towers had pierced the blue of the sky
I'd sworn to rule with an iron mace, till I met the Master face-to-face*

*Aah, I met Him, and knew Him and blushed to see, His eyes full of sorrow were fixed upon me
I faltered and fell at His feet that day, While my castles melted and vanished away
They melted and vanished and in their place, Nothing else could I see but the Master's face*

*My thoughts are now for the souls of men, I'd lost my life to find it again
Since that day in the quiet place, when I met the Master face-to-face*

That's the way it was with these two men. Andrew, the lesser brother, and John, nicknamed 'Boanerges', meaning a son of thunder – hot tempered, impetuous, strong-willed, later to become John, the beloved. And they followed Him. Jesus' response to them in verse 38 is a probing question as He asks, "What do you want?" They say to Him, "where are you staying?" Don't you think that's quite a strange thing to say? Jesus goes, "Fellas, what are you looking for?" And they go, "where do you live?" Why would the disciples say that? Because the questions, 'what do you want' is a question that demands time to think through your answer – they'll give Him an answer once they spend some time with Him and see what He's like.

Let ask you: what is your motive for following Christ? Is it to become part of a certain crowd, to be part of a happening church, or is it to build your business network connections? This is a searching question – it's a motive question. Why do YOU follow Christ?

And so they went and saw where He was staying – by the way, this is one of the rare times when Jesus' dwelling is mentioned. Some people speculate as to where He was staying but the fact is the place isn't important – what is important is the person. And so they stayed with Him for a few hours. Ever thought about staying with Jesus? I hope you have. You'll be doing it for an eternity – MOST OF YOU! And they talked and got to know Him better.

B. Simon Peter. (vv.40-42)

The scene now changes and we see Andrew thoroughly convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. So what does he do? That very night he rushes off to find his brother, Simon. Let's try to make this more real what must have happened: Knock, knock. "Aah, Saint Andrew, why callest thou at such a late hour past the twilight?" No, of course it wasn't like that, he must have said, "Andy, what's the matter bro? Why you knocking on my door so late?" Andrew said, "We've found Him!" "You found who?" "We've found the Messiah! I've just left from His place. I know where He lives. Come on!!" And so Simon went.

So what just happened? We see Andrew leading another one to Jesus. It's interesting to note that every time we meet Andrew in this gospel, he is bringing someone to Jesus. In chapter 6, he brings a little boy with five loaves and two fish. In chapter 12, he again brings some Greeks to Jesus. I tell you this, he may have lived in his brother's shadow, but he became and remained a faithful, fruitful follower. And so Simon stood before Jesus, and Jesus looked at him. Man, Jesus really must have looked into his soul.

Approach: So the approach Andrew used here is that of personal evangelism. One-on-one contact. It may be with someone you know, a co-worker, a friend, a loved-one.

Message: And the message was, "We have found the Messiah!"

Response: Here's the response, Jesus said, "You are called Simon – because your name means 'shifting, vacillating, wavering, lacking stability'. But you will be called Peter – that because you will become like a rock - stable, dependable, steady, rock-solid." Peter had a face-to-face encounter with Christ, and that was all the encouragement he needed to follow Him.

I really love this: Jesus saw them not as they were, but as they were to become. That's how He saw you and me. Under the magnifying glass of Scripture, we can see that Peter had a lot of rough edges – sometimes hard-headed, impulsive, impetuous. But Jesus was able to see beyond all that, beyond the rough edges to the precious stone beneath, beyond the stubbornness to the stability. Jesus had a jeweller's eye for spotting a diamond in the rough. How about you? Can you see the potential in others? Can you see beneath all the rough edges to the precious stone hidden within your child? Can you spot that jewel-in-the-making when you look at your spouse or your friend? Oftentimes, a simple recognition of the presence of the jewel is all the encouragement people need to start chipping away at their own rough edges, bringing that precious stone to light.

Here's just one more thought: when gold is mined, there are several tons of dirt that must be moved to get an ounce of gold; but here's the thing, you don't go into the mine looking for dirt – you go in looking for gold. And in the same way, that is how we are developed – don't go looking for the dirt, look for the gold. And that is the hope Jesus gave to Peter. He saw Peter as he was to become. Once again you see, a small challenge gives a small response, but a big challenge gets a heroic response.

C. Philip. (vv.43-44)

And now Philip. John rescues Philip from oblivion. What I mean is that John is the only writer that gives any revealing character sketch of him in the Bible.

Approach: The approach is an example of what can be called cold-contact evangelism. A stranger with another stranger. Jesus confronted Philip directly on the street.

Message: And the message was simple and straightforward, "Follow me."

Response: The response is implied in verses 44-46 – Philip followed Him. No high pressure sales pitch, no recruiting posters, no campaign promises, no job security, no annual salary. Just a call to abandon everything and put Jesus in first place. Let's just take a closer look at this idea of abandonment:

Isaiah 53:6: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way." This is a universal statement about the nature of man. We each go our own way just like sheep. You know, sheep can be so silly when you let them alone – they bleat, they run around in circles, they go one way and then back. Philip was such a sheep, he was going his own way and then Jesus met him.

Job 23:10-12: "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. 11 My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside. 12 I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread." But this now is a strong contrast of abandonment. "His steps, His way, His lips, His mouth." Not our way – His. Jesus said to Philip, "Follow me."

And I am suggesting to you this morning that Philip left his way and went God's way.

Something some of you here might need to do. Some of you may come to church here, you may carry a Bible, you may even have brought a friend along before – but you know in your heart-of-hearts that you have not fully abandoned your way to go God's way.... Yet. This doesn't mean that you need to enter some kind of full-time paid ministry. But rather that you have not yet truly given Jesus Christ first place in your life. I want you to chew on what Philip did.

D. Nathanael. (vv.45-51)

Immediately and enthusiastically, Philip found Nathanael and told him the good news. Nathanael respond in honest scepticism, without hypocrisy. When they met, Jesus greeted Nathanael in an astonishing manner which left an amazing impression upon him.

Approach: Philip's approach is similar to Andrew's approach to Peter. However, it is possible that the Word of God played an integral part in Nathanael's coming to the Christ – perhaps we could call it Word evangelism. Let me explain: Jesus said that He saw Nathanael under a fig tree. The Jewish Talmud (which is the writing of Jewish scholars and became the lifestyle of many Jews today) encourages sincere Jews to pray, meditate, and study the Scriptures, at least once a day, in places of solitude such as under a large tree. Oftentimes a fig tree provided such a place where they were to seek out God at least once a day. I think that Nathanael was under the tree, studying and meditating upon the Old Testament scriptures. That's why Philip mentions Moses and the prophets because Nathanael was digging in the Old Testament prophecies. Remember Philip the evangelist and the Ethiopian in Acts 8? That's another example of Word evangelism.

Message: Philip said to Nathanael, "Hey, Nate. I know you're looking for Him. Well guess what? We've found Him. He's Jesus of Nazareth." "NAZARETH?!!!" was Nathanael's reply. You're probably wondering why he responded like that. Well, if you lived in that time you know that Nazareth was a stop-over dingy caravan town. Today, it would be the equivalent of like saying, "Hey, we've found Jesus of King's Cross!!" You see, they expected Jesus to come from the highest hill of Rome – but Nazareth?? Yuck!

Now, I'm going to say to you that Nathanael had every right in the world to say that because Jesus didn't rebuke him at all for it. When Jesus saw him later, He didn't say, "Aah, there you are Nathanael, you old critic!" No, He really said, "Behold, an Israelite who is honest!" Nathanael honestly wonders how a Nazarene could come and be the Messiah. He was logical and a thinker. By the way, that's exactly how Jesus accepts every sceptic sitting here today. Every other Christian may reject you for your scepticism but Jesus has never rejected a sceptic who has come to Him by faith.

Response: Jesus said to him, "Nathanael, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." "How could you? I was all alone." Jesus continued, "I saw you long before Philip arrived." And it is absolutely amazing because it seems that was all Nathanael needed to hear. Nathanael responded by saying that Jesus was the Son of God, the King of Israel. Jesus said to him, in effect, "Nathanael, I'm offering a message as the Son of God to this nation and ultimately, the world." And Nathanael said, "I accept it, and I believe it."

Jesus says to him that because he believes, he can expect to see even greater things. He goes on to say that he'll even see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. I want you to remember the last time you read of a similar picture – in Genesis 28, when Jacob saw a vision of a staircase leading up to heaven with angels going up and down on it. What Jesus is saying in effect is that He is now that 'staircase'. He is now the link between God and man, and Nathanael, in due time, will see and understand this.

Illustration: I heard a story of a preacher called Ian Thomas who said that he boarded a plane and wanted to be seated alone so that he could prepare his itinerary and study for his sermon. So he had a good spot all by himself, and this student of the Word began to work upon his notes when all of a sudden, across on the other side, he began to hear the sound of pages turning. He thought, "That sounds like a Bible." He looks over and this guy is rifling through a Bible. The guys looks over at Ian and says, "Say, you know anything about the Bible?" Ian says to himself, "Know anything about the Bible?" The man continued, "Yeah, I've been reading here in.... the.... in John and about 'Ni-co... Ni-co-demus? You know anything about that?" So Ian says to himself, "Thanks for the peace and quiet, God." He says, "So I went over to him and led Him to Christ."

That's Word evangelism. The Word had done it's work of preparation, and had wedged itself into his heart, and he couldn't do anything else. That's what happened to some of you. God's Word had that magnetic appeal and you've never been the same. May that never cease.

CONCLUSION

Let me point out that we have just examined the first five followers of Christ – the approach, the message, and their response. Each of them made a personal decision that changed their lives forever. My message has one design today – to get you off the fence. You've ridden it long enough. Jesus doesn't want just a couple of minutes you've got to spare. He say, "I want your life! Every minute of every day, brought under the authority of my control Get off the fence."

At this moment, I want to invite you to step off the fence. No, I command you, with the authority of the Lord Jesu Christ, to get off the fence. If you've never trusted Jesus Christ, and the cross, the empty tomb, available and provided to you, without a cost on your behalf, then by faith, give Jesus your heart and begin to follow Him. Don't give Him a part of your heart, give Him all of it. No reservations.

Christians, what I'm saying to you is this: *"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."* Christ is priority number one.

Let us pray.

Father, forgive us for the times we've ridden the fence, those moments of indecision – the months, even the years. May we be gripped by the importance of responding by faith, a decision to serve Jesus Christ and Him only. May it be more important that the necessary food of this noon hour, more important than any friendship, any business, or any ministry. I ask for Jesus' sake, Amen.